Yes, Sir. The Government is formulating the details of proposals designed to further streamline and simplify passport services with a view to increasing productivity and reducing delays.

भारत-अमरीका संबंध

2678. **श्री सोम पाल** : क्या विदेशमंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि संयुक्त राज्य अमरीका में नया राष्ट्रपति चुने जाने के बाद भारत-अमरीका संबंधों को प्रगाढ़ बनाने के लिए सरकार द्वारा उठाये गये कदमों का ब्यौरा क्या है?

विदेश मंत्री (श्री दिनेश सिंह) : सरकार भारत-अमरीकी संबंधों में हो रहे सुधार को बहुत उच्च प्राथमिकता देती है और नए अमरीकी प्रशासन के साथ विभिन्न स्तरों पर सम्पर्क स्थापित किए गए हैं। सरकार का प्रस्ताव है कि नए अमरीकी प्रशासन के साथ पारस्परिक कार्यकलापों को बढ़ाया जाए ताकि द्विपक्षीय संबंध, विशेष रूप से परस्पर हित चिन्ता के क्षेत्रों में, और अधिक सुदृढ़ हो सकें।

भारत-अमरीकी संबंध बहु-आयामी हैं। हालांकि अमरीका के साथ इस समय चल रही हमारी बातचीत में कई क्षेत्र शामिल हैं, लेकिन सरकार आर्थिक एवं वाणिज्यिक क्षेत्रों में मौजूद संभावनाओं को विशेष महत्व देती है।

Character Certificates required for passports

2679. SHRI SOM PAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the applicants for passports are required to submit a certificate of character certified by a gazetted officer;

(b) whether it is also a fact that such certificates issued and signed by Members of Parliament are not acceptable to passport offices;

(c) if so, what is the rationnale thereof; and

(d) if not, whether Government propose to issue instructions to the regional passport offices accordingly and also publicise these for public knowledge?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) No Sir. A Verification Certificate is an optional document which may be attached by any applicant if he so chooses.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. Government have considered the proposal for reintroduction of the system authorising the Members of Parliament to sign Verification Certificates for applicants. During recent Debates in Parliament, there was strong opposition to the proposal from large sections of Hon'ble Members. In view of this, Government have decided that Central and State Legislators would not be authorised to sign Verification Certificates.

(d) Does not arise.

Admission to Indian students in commonwealth countries

2680. SHRI BISHAMBHAR NATH PANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have warned the Indian Students not to seek direct admission to the educational institutions in countries of Commonwealth of Independent States;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DINESH SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. Government of India had issued three advisory notices in February, July and November, 1992, informing all concerned that following the dissolution of former USSR, changes

are taking place in the educational policies of the Independent Republics of the former Soviet Union in so far as foreign students are concerned. In view of this Ministry of External Affairs had advised Indian students not to seek direct admission in the educational institutions of the former USSR on self-financing or non-governmental sponsored basis, inter-alia, till such time as formal agreements had been entered into with the newly independent States that have emerged from the former Soviet Union.

(c) The advisory notices have been issued to protect the interests of Indian students.

Protest by India against Air Raid on IRAQ

2681. PROF. SAURIN BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government had lodged a protest against the U.S.A., British and French air raid on Iraq in violation of that country's sovereignty;

(b) if so, what was the response of aggressors; and

(c) if not, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs had issued a statement regarding these air raids, a copy of which is enclosed.

AIR STRIKES AGAINST IRAQ

Answering a question on the punitive air strikes of the US, France and UK against Iraq, the official spokesman stated that India hoped that dangerous escalations would be avoided by strict adherence to the terms of the ceasefire after the Gulf War and full recognition and observance of the sovereignty, integrity and international legitimacy of all States in the Gulf region.

Difficult situation faced by Hongkong citizens of Indian origin

2682. SHRI JAGDISH PRASAD MATHUR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the imminent difficult situation that the Honkong citizens of Indian origin have to face because of transfer of Hongkong to China by Britain in 1997;

(b) whether Government propose to take up the matter with British Government or China to property accommendate them; and

(c) whether Government propose to accord Indian citizenship to those persons who may like to return to India?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DINESH SINGH): (a) There are about 5,000 persons of Indian origin in Hong Kong who hold either British Dependent Territories Citizenship (BDTC) or British National (overseas) (BN(O)) passports, issued by the British Government. These persons are part of a group of approximately 3.25 million persons with similar status (British Dependent Territories Citizenship/British national (overseas) in Hong Kong. The holders of these documents are not entitled to the automatic right of abode in the United Kingdom. This category of persons, is however, expected to qualify for continued abode in Hong Kong after the territory reverts to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

(b) and (c) The matter has been raised with the British and Chinese Governments. It has been the consistent position of the Government of India that the British Government has basic responsibility towards this group of persons and that it should take necessary steps to safeguard the status of these persons as British citizens. Government have also seen recent reports quoting a senior Chinese official that this group of persons did have the option of applying for Chinese citizenship. They can apply for Indian citizenship, if they so desire.